

August 30, 2004

Half of Women Who Die from Cervical Cancer Don't Receive Simple Screening

The Pap test, a screening for the early detection of cervical cancer in women, is one of the great success stories of medical science, but nearly half of the women who die from cervical cancer each year have never been screened for the disease.

In a January, 2004, report to Congress, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) called for the reduction of cervical cancer incidence and deaths by increasing Pap test screening among women. Of the estimated 4,100 women in the United States who die from cervical cancer each year, nearly half have never been screened for cervical cancer, and another 10 percent have not had a Pap test within the previous five years.

The Pap test detects about 95% of cervical cancer and, according to the CDC report, the survival rates for cervical cancer are more than 90% if detected early and managed properly.

The major reason cervical cancer rates are so low in the United States is the widespread availability of Pap tests. The conventional Pap test, which has been in use since the 1950's, can detect not only early-stage cervical cancer, which is highly treatable, but also cervical dysplasia which is pre-cancerous changes of cervical cells which can linger for years, allowing for the removal of affected tissue long before invasive cancer sets in. Since the introduction of the Pap test, cases of cervical cancer in the United States have decreased dramatically, down 74 percent between 1955 and 1992.

The American Cancer Society estimates more than half of the women diagnosed with cervical cancer in this country have not had a Pap test in the last three years. According to the American Social Health Association, almost all new cases of cervical cancer and cervical cancer deaths could be prevented with regular Pap screening.

"The most important risk factor for invasive cervical cancer in women is a failure to receive timely screening, and if necessary, treatment of pre-cancerous cervical lesions," said Linda Shaffer, RN, Clinical Nurse Supervisor for South Central District Health. "Only 50 years ago, cervical cancer was the leading cause of death among women in the United States."

Idaho data shows that there were 76 cervical cancer deaths among female Idahoans between 1998 and 2002. This constitutes 1.5 percent of all female cancer deaths and 0.3 percent of all female deaths. Over half (56.6 percent) of cervical cancer deaths in Idaho occurred among women between ages 25 and 54. Statistics also show that older women are underrepresented in cervical cancer screening programs.

"In south central Idaho in 2002, the percentage of women who had not had a Pap test within three years was 21.9 percent," said Shaffer. "That is much higher than the state average of 17.5 percent of women who had not had a Pap test in the last three years. Cervical cancer is entirely preventable, treatable, and curable, and the first step is to have a regular Pap test."

Who should have a Pap screening? "All women within three years after their first sexual activity and all women by age 21 should have a Pap test," said Shaffer.

The health care provider will recommend the frequency of screening for each individual. The frequency depends upon many factors including age and risk factors.

South Central District Health includes Pap tests during reproductive health clinics on the following schedule:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
1st Week of the Month	Twin Falls 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.	Burley 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.	Jerome 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. Hailey (Bellevue) 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.	Twin Falls 1 p.m. – 5 p.m.
2nd Week	Twin Falls 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.	Burley 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.	Jerome 3 – 5 p.m. Hailey (Bellevue) 2 – 6 p.m.	Twin Falls 1 p.m. – 5 p.m.
3rd Week	Twin Falls 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.	Burley 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.	Jerome 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. Hailey (Bellevue) 2 – 6 p.m.	Twin Falls 1 p.m. – 5 p.m.
4th Week	Twin Falls 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.	Burley 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.	Jerome 3 – 5 p.m. Hailey (Bellevue) 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.	Twin Falls 1 p.m. – 5 p.m.
5th Week	Twin Falls 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.	Burley 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.		Twin Falls 1 p.m. – 5 p.m.

Charges for reproductive health services are based on income and family size using a sliding fee scale. No one will be refused services because of inability to pay. Offices that offer reproductive health services are located in:

Office	Address	Phone Number
Twin Falls	1020 Washington St. N.	734-5900
Burley	2311 Parke Ave., Unit 4, Suite 4	678-8221
Jerome	951 East Avenue H	324-8838
Hailey (Bellevue)	513 N. Main <i>(Note: The Hailey office will be moving to Bellevue on September 18. The new office is located at 117 East Ash St.)</i>	788-4335 <i>(The phone number will remain the same for the new Bellevue office.)</i>

Pap tests are also part of the Women's Health Check program. Women who are between the ages of 50 and 64, are low income, and have no insurance coverage for physical exams, Pap tests, or mammograms may contact the Women's Health Check Coordinator in the Twin Falls office or the public health nurse in local District Health offices. For more information about Women's Health Check, call 734-5900 ext. 238.

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